

FireFighter

TUC Magazine of the Year

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November/December 2009



ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Stop the cuts to frontline services and scrap regional controls, FBU tells MPs [See p 10](#)



We will not be bullied



Our national rally at Westminster Central Hall followed by the lobby of Parliament on 21 October and the issues around it are the core of this issue of *Firefighter*. It was a hugely successful lobby with more than 1,800 FBU members attending, most of whom were able to speak to their MP.

The lobby, and the rally before it, clearly showed our widespread concerns about cuts to frontline services, the absence of national standards and the

wasteful, unnecessary and disastrous FireControl project. More than 150 MPs have now signed Early Day Motion 1800 calling for the FireControl project to be scrapped.

Together we showed our determination to protect our service, our profession, our colleagues who work in emergency fire control and the service we provide our communities. Above all we showed that we are all Part of the Team, a team that provides a truly excellent public service when we have the resources, training, personnel and

equipment to do the job.

MPs and others working in Parliament said the turnout was an incredible achievement. It has been noticed by the ministers responsible for fire services at Westminster and in the devolved administrations. As a result MPs have raised the issues in Parliament and have been pressing ministers about them.

Thanks to all those who joined the rally and lobby and to those who have supported the issues behind the lobby but were unable to attend.

Those issues include a range of

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South Yorkshire firefighters strike against threats to sack them

MARTIN JENKINSON

attacks on frontline services through cuts or attempts to rip up terms and conditions of employment. It also includes, in Merseyside, the victimisation of a union official, Kevin Hughes. These have sparked a number of local campaigns reported in this issue: ballots, industrial action short of a strike and strike action itself in South Yorkshire.

The Fire Brigades Union has not created these disputes. They have been started by the actions of fire authorities with the backing of chief officers. As elsewhere, our South Yorkshire members have not picked this fight, but they will not run away from it and have made clear they will not be bullied into submission.

To threaten to sack firefighters to force through new contracts is about as aggressive an act as you can get. It is also an aggressive move against the union as a whole to sack a local official of this union, elected by members to represent their views.

There is a wider issue of attacks on public services and the unions which protect them. Postal workers and their union are facing attacks from politicians and the media for daring to stand up for themselves and I applaud them for the stand they are taking. I urge members all over the country to visit their local postal depot to show solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the CWU.

It is part of the major attack on public

services which is already taking place and is set to get worse. Public spending is in crisis because of the failure of successive governments to rein in the greed and incompetence of the banks.

It is that greed which drove the world banking system to the point of collapse. No firefighter, teacher, health worker or postal worker played any part in creating that crisis.

But the greed and the bonuses are back with public service workers being told they will pay the price with cuts and pay freezes.

The FBU will not stand idly by. We will protect our jobs, our conditions and the fire and rescue service itself.

Matt Wrack



STEFANO CAGNONI

LETTER

The FBU: a remarkable trade union

I am so grateful to the FBU for the commutation campaign which has resulted in Essex Fire Authority increasing my commuted sum and paying it into our account. This would not have happened but for you the union.

I knew there was something not quite right about the total pension figure when I left in May 2007 but expected nothing further. This is never going to happen again, so our sincere thanks.

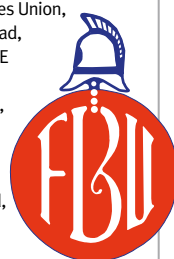
Over the last 30 years I have noted with pride the amount of effort that the FBU nationally and regionally will put into issues that affect small groups and even individual members. The FBU is a remarkable trade union.

Jack and Jane Imrie
OOT Essex

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FBU fire control
members rally at
Westminster



The Cleveland area has one of the highest industrial risks in the whole of western Europe

'Cut here and nowhere is safe'

CLEVELAND

Cleveland fire crews have hit out at moves to cut fire crews at Billingham fire station in the heart of Teesside's petrochemical industry.

The area has 37 of the highest accident hazard sites in the country, known as top-tier COMAH sites (Control of Major Accident Hazard sites).

There are fuel storage facilities in the vicinity of Billingham fire station with a capacity 100 times greater than the largest storage tank at Buncefield oil storage depot in Hertfordshire.

When a number of tanks exploded at Buncefield in December 2005 over 40 people were injured, local residential and commercial properties were damaged and local people were evacuated. The fire burned

for several days, emitting large clouds of black smoke into the atmosphere.

Steve Watson, Cleveland FBU brigade secretary, said: "This area has one of the highest industrial risks in the whole of western Europe.

"The industries in this area pay national and local taxes and one of the services they get as a business is the fire service. It is one of the most important services for large and small businesses.

"There have been major incidents in this area. If you can justify cuts in one of the highest risk industrial areas in the whole of Western Europe, then nowhere is safe."

The fire authority plans to cut one fire engine, reducing the station to a one-pump station, with the loss of 22 frontline firefighting posts.

The FBU has pointed out that the cut

will mean firefighters taking longer to get to 999 emergencies and a worse service for the people of Cleveland.

The cut will have a knock-on effect in surrounding areas, which rely on crews at Billingham for back-up in emergencies, and will also mean appliances from Stockton and Hartlepool fire stations having to spend more time in the Billingham station area, depriving those areas of fire cover.

"Cutting a fire engine and firefighters means spreading resources more thinly and that means taking longer to get to 999 incidents," said Steve Watson.

"It does have an effect on community safety and on how we respond to industrial incidents."

The proposal was subject to a public consultation process that ended on 3 November.

Deal avoids sackings after 2 years – and 17-hour talks

LINCOLNSHIRE

After a dispute stretching back more than two years, the FBU has reached agreement with Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue over shift patterns and avoided the threat of sackings and imposed new contracts.

The fire authority had sought to impose changed working conditions including having day crews at four stations – Gainsborough, Skegness, Grantham and Boston – working outside the terms agreed in the Grey Book.

Three months ago Lincolnshire management announced that it planned to rip up the contracts of 112 wholetime firefighters, including those working at the county's two 24-hour stations (Lincoln North and South), who were working nine-hour day and 15-hour night shifts, as well as the day-crewed stations.

The brigade threatened to sack them and re-employ them on imposed new contracts

for 12-hour days and nights.

The joint secretaries (the national FBU and employers' representatives) were called in and after 17 hours of negotiations agreement was reached on 11-hour day and 13-hour night shifts."

FBU Executive Council member Dave Green said: "This has been a difficult and protracted dispute with management making promises and then pulling out and withdrawing offers. They made what should have been an easy process almost impossible to untangle. It's been like trying to knit fog.

"However at long last the brigade has moved enough for us to recommend the deal to members who have now voted to accept. We have also secured assurances about working routines which we hope will maintain members' conditions.

"There has been a breakdown of trust over the last two and a half years and management is going to have to stick to the agreement and work hard to regain the trust of members."



FBU members from all over the UK demonstrated in Barnsley against South Yorkshire Fire Authority's threat to sack hundreds of firefighters in a bid to impose new shift patterns

■ See Aerial Ladder Platform, page 8

Anger over plans to slash city's cover

DERBYSHIRE

Derbyshire fire crews have reacted angrily to plans to slash fire cover in Derby's city centre by removing the second fire engine from Ascot Drive fire station in the city.

Chris Tapp, Derbyshire FBU brigade chair, said: "We are deeply concerned. We don't believe that the public in Derby have been made properly aware of these proposals, never mind been asked for

an opinion on them.

"The plans mean the number of frontline appliances in Derby would: be cut from four to three.

"Ascot Drive is currently by far the busiest fire station in Derby and we have real concerns over how fire cover in Derby is being compromised.

"We have not been convinced by any of the evidence provided that this will improve the service and we have to remember that this cut comes on top of a

reduction in 36 firefighters from Derbyshire in 2006."

Dave Green, Executive Council member for the FBU in the East Midlands said: "The fire authority talks about consultation, but it is a paper exercise.

"The number of wholetime firefighters in Derbyshire has been reduced over the years and with a critical lack of part-time firefighters in rural areas, we are deeply concerned as to what the future holds."

Sounding off!

ADRIAN CLARKE

Region 9 Secretary

The trees bore witness ...

The trees bore witness: just one of many thoughts as I stood on the grass in Auschwitz-Birkenau next to the remains of one of the gas chambers that the Nazis had tried to destroy before the extermination camp was liberated on 27 January 1945.

Surrounded by trees, I felt the need to touch one, to try somehow to connect with those who suffered such a terrible fate in this place.

Outside those trees was the barbed wire and beyond the countryside of Poland, where so many must have had their final glimpse of freedom and life.

We had arrived at Auschwitz that morning (our visit was part of a Region 9 political

I ask you to remember what the far right means – its past and, if we allow it, its future

school) and I had felt nervous, not knowing what to expect.

We passed through the gates, the words "work makes free" above our heads, and trod the same steps as others had done in very different circumstances.

As our guide showed us round, it was hard to understand the sheer horror or scale of what had taken place there. The words "barbaric" "brutal" "medieval" flashed through my thoughts, coupled with emotions of anger, sadness, hate and strange thoughts of the sheer efficiency of the camps as a method of disposal – because that is truly what they were.

You go through the blocks, their walls lined with photos of the faces of those murdered.

The shaven heads and prison uniform were an attempt to dehumanise them, but the stories of compassion among the camp prisoners told these many years on are testimony to the ability of the human spirit to remain.

I am grateful to my union for giving me the opportunity to experience this and ask you to remember what the far right means – its past and, if we allow it, its future.



Region 9 students view a demolished gas chamber

In brief

Essex fire crews have been astonished by a threat to end essential fitness training for all crews because of a union claim for parity for retained firefighters. Chief fire officer David Johnson dismissed the FBU proposal as "ridiculous demands", claimed such a move would cost almost £1m and threatened "to remove fitness training time from wholetime firefighters' daily routine". Essex FBU retained rep Chris Cox said: "Retained firefighters do the same job and face the same risks as full-time firefighters. All we are asking is to have the same standard of fitness training provisions as the rest of the frontline professionals. We hope that in the cold light of day the management will calm down and realise this is a matter that deserves to be discussed properly."

Eight Palestinian firefighters are visiting Britain in a project organised by the FBU in Scotland in conjunction with the Scottish Government and the Scottish Fire Services Training College. Based in Nablus in the West Bank, they are spending three weeks at the college training in BA, search and rescue, road traffic and urban search and rescue. A fourth week in Manchester will be spent training to be instructors themselves.



Nablus firefighters at work, watched by an Israeli tank

Roddy Robertson, FBU Executive Council member for Scotland, has welcomed a Scottish Parliament debate on the fire and rescue service. "We are delighted with the comments made by so many MSPs," he said. "Not only do they value the service we provide to our communities, but are now beginning to appreciate the issues of concern that need to be addressed and are identifying positive solutions for the future." Scotland's minister for community safety, Fergus Ewing, had praised the work of firefighters and emergency fire control operators and made commitments to work to improve the services.

Merseyside warning over cuts and sacking

MERSEYSIDE

Merseyside fire crews have given the fire authority seven days to withdraw proposed cuts and to reinstate sacked union official Kevin Hughes or they will ballot for industrial action.

The move on October 28, as *Firefighter* went to press, was in addition to the 'Yes' vote by members for strike action in support of Kevin Hughes. This remains in place, although no strike dates have yet been set.

The authority had announced cuts including the loss of 68 frontline posts and moving another 36 firefighter posts to office-based work on support staff pay and conditions.

The authority has also extended the use of the controversial Low Level Activity and Risk (LLAR) system at Eccleston fire station, which means longer response times, extended working hours and the loss of firefighter posts in breach of an agreement to seek the involvement of the conciliation service ACAS.

The union says there have



Kevin Hughes: His sacking is part of the fire authority's aggressive actions, says brigade secretary Les Skarratts

been breaches of the agreement that ended a dispute in 2006 and has accused the fire authority of aggressive management and a lack of compromise or flexibility.

Les Skarratts, Merseyside FBU brigade secretary, said: "These are real cuts to the number of frontline firefighters in Merseyside which will impact on how we respond to 999 emergencies. It will mean

fewer firefighters spread more thinly taking longer to get to incidents."

Kevin Hughes, vice-chair of Merseyside FBU, was dismissed after allegations of assault which he has always denied.

"The local fire crews have had enough, but all we are doing is responding to the aggressive actions of the fire authority which includes sacking Kevin Hughes," said Les Skarratts.

"There was no substance to the allegations made which is why he was never charged after a thorough police investigation.

"There is a lack of compromise and flexibility on their part.

"We have held a number of meetings with the fire authority, including two NJC meetings, but our proposals have been ignored or rejected.

"The cutbacks will mean that we can't maintain our present staffing levels on appliances answering emergency calls.

"Unless the fire authority has a change of heart and wants to reach a compromise then the union will be forced into a further ballot which will extend the dispute."

Real life exposes folly of cuts

ESSEX

Essex fire crews are asking for a review of cuts imposed on 1 October after a series of 999 incidents exposed problems. The union says the cuts have already started to affect the service's ability to respond effectively to emergencies.

Cuts to the crewing of rescue tenders (RTs) and aerial ladder platforms (ALPs) means they are not always available to respond to 999 calls because there are too few firefighters to crew all the fire engines.

In October a fire in Colchester saw the ALP and the two fire engines from Colchester fire station being used. At the same time a road traffic collision required Colchester's RT – but there was no-one left at the station to crew it. Before the cuts, Colchester's ALP and RT would both have had dedicated specialist crews available to respond

immediately to both emergencies.

In the same week, Colchester's ALP was mobilised to Chelmsford at the same time as a road traffic collision in Harwich. The closest available RT with a specialist crew was in Harlow – over 60 miles away. Even on blue lights Harlow to Harwich takes a long time. It also meant there was no RT at Harlow to attend incidents in that part of the county.

Later that same day there was a major alert at Stansted. Before the cuts, Harlow would have sent its ALP and RT appliances. But Harlow's now single specialist crew was sent only on the rescue tender, leaving Harlow's ALP idle at the fire station.

Adrian Clarke, FBU regional secretary, said: "These are real-life incidents where the lack of dedicated crews for specialist vehicles has brutally exposed the gaps. What might work in theory is not working properly in practice."

Off the database

DNA

On 27 December 2008 Hereford and Worcester firefighter Matt Repton was arrested on the suspicion of causing death by dangerous driving when on duty. He had a DNA sample taken and his DNA profile was loaded on to the national DNA database.

At around 0645 that morning he had attended a road traffic collision on the M5 to M42 eastbound slip road. The crew undertook Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service's standard operating procedures (SOP) for motorways and Matt, as the driver, had parked the appliance in a 'fend off' position.

Shortly after the arrival of the fire crew a vehicle came down the eastbound slip road spun and collided with the rear and side of the fire appliance, killing one of the occupants of the car. Matt had been at the scene for just over a minute.

He was arrested by West Mercia police, cautioned for causing death by dangerous driving, taken to Redditch police station, processed and placed in a cell. He was later questioned and released on police bail.

The Crown Prosecution Service later found no reasons or indeed evidence to bring charges. He was guilty of no offence.

The 2001 and 2003 Criminal Justice Acts extended the power of police to retain the DNA samples of anyone convicted of a crime to include anyone who is charged, cautioned or warned, regardless of whether or not they are found guilty.

Since 2001, nearly 1 million DNA profiles from people who

have never been convicted of a crime have been stored on the DNA database. Matt's is one of those profiles.

The European Court of Human Rights has ruled that the policy of retaining indefinitely the DNA samples and profiles of innocent people is unlawful and a breach of human rights.

With the backing of the FBU Matt started a campaign to have his DNA sample, finger-

'This shows, once again, that an injury to one is an injury to all and when united we can make the difference'

prints and photographs removed from the police database.

FBU regional secretary Chris Downes said: "It was difficult to find out how to get Matt's details removed. The police send only standard letters in reply and issue no advice, guidance or information as to how or where to go to get details removed."

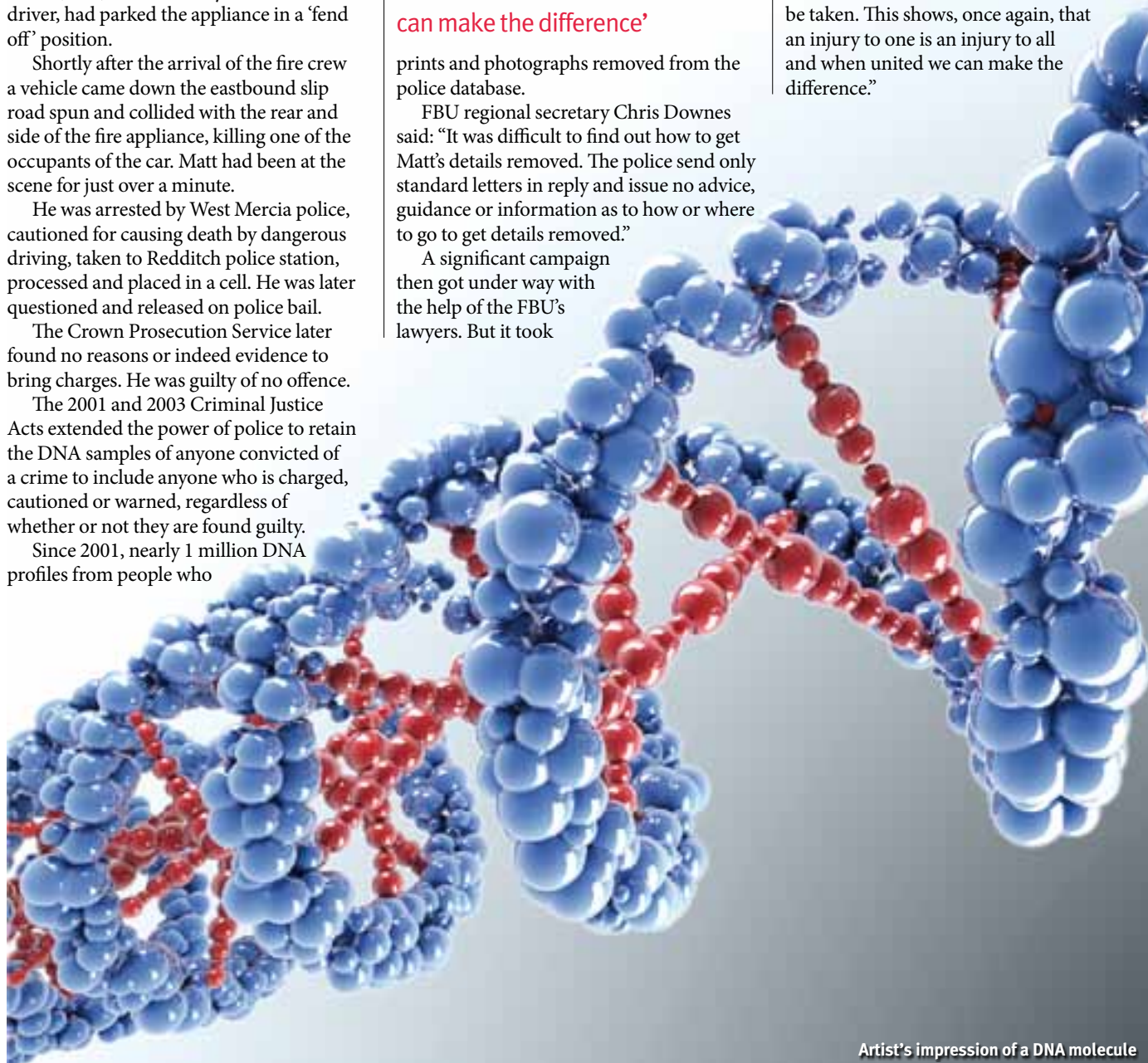
A significant campaign then got under way with the help of the FBU's lawyers. But it took

nearly a year of campaigning and publicity to have the details removed.

Matt has now received confirmation from West Mercia Police that his DNA and other details will be removed from the national database.

Peter Hope, Hereford and Worcester brigade chair, said: "The FBU played a key role in righting this wrong. But this should be of wider concern because Matt was at work as a firefighter doing his job to the standard operating procedures set down.

"Thompsons solicitors will look at the question of whether the arrest was lawful and, if it was not, take what action needs to be taken. This shows, once again, that an injury to one is an injury to all and when united we can make the difference."



Artist's impression of a DNA molecule

Firefighters have been pushed to the limit

IAN MURRAY, SOUTH YORKSHIRE FBU REGIONAL SECRETARY

South Yorkshire fire crews were preparing for a third round of strike action over their fire authority's threat to dismiss 744 firefighters as this issue of *Firefighter* went to press. The authority made the threat in a bid to force through contractual changes to make members work four consecutive 12-hour shifts.

No firefighter ever wants to take strike action, it's a last resort. But the management of South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue has pushed their firefighters to the limit and left them no alternative.

South Yorkshire members were due to take strike action from 1600 hours until midnight for five days from 31 October to 4 November. The union campaign committee

was due to meet on 30 October to discuss further action if no acceptable offer from the authority was received.

The latest planned action follows two 24-hour strikes on 19 and 23 October over South Yorkshire's threat to sack 744 firefighters if they do not accept new employment contracts. The authority wants to force members to work 12-hour day and night shifts instead of the current nine-hour days and 15-hour nights.

Terminating contracts to impose change would set a dangerous precedent that could affect members throughout the UK fire and rescue service.

Through the October strike action and earlier action short of a strike, South

Yorkshire firefighters have shown that they oppose sackings to impose worsened conditions of service which would disrupt childcare and have a massive impact on members' family lives.

As South Yorkshire firefighter Mark Wild explained after the FBU's pre-strike rally in Barnsley on 28 September: "I've got a young family and it means there will be a good two and a half to three days when I can't see them.

"I'll be out to work before they wake up and I'll be back home after they've gone to bed."

We've had magnificent support from brigades throughout the UK. They have turned up to support us on the picket lines

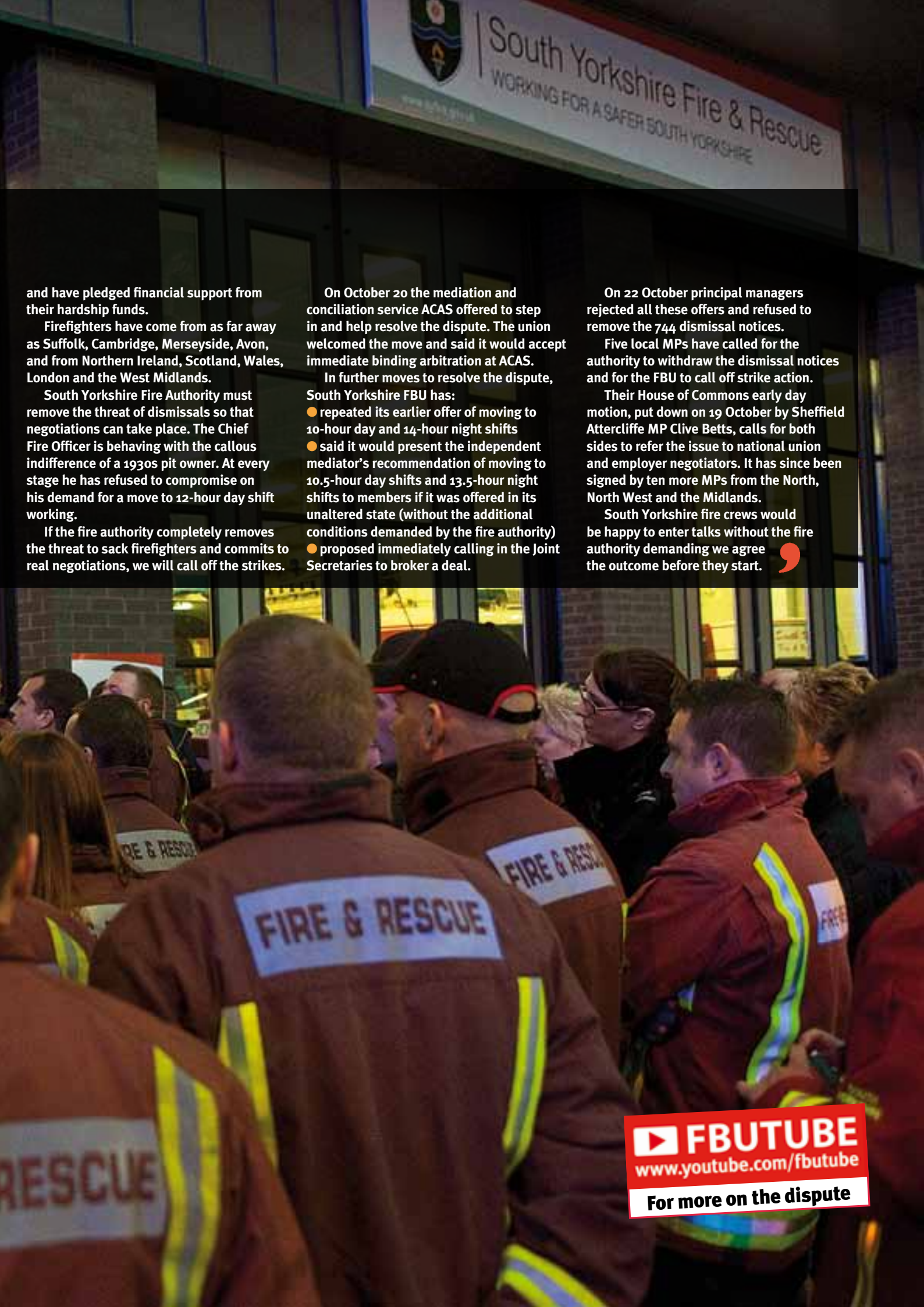


Caution
CCTV
recording
progress

Solidarity: FBU London EC member Ian Leahair addresses South Yorkshire FBU members in Sheffield as they begin a 24-hour strike on 19 October

MARTIN JENKINSON





and have pledged financial support from their hardship funds.

Firefighters have come from as far away as Suffolk, Cambridge, Merseyside, Avon, and from Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, London and the West Midlands.

South Yorkshire Fire Authority must remove the threat of dismissals so that negotiations can take place. The Chief Fire Officer is behaving with the callous indifference of a 1930s pit owner. At every stage he has refused to compromise on his demand for a move to 12-hour day shift working.

If the fire authority completely removes the threat to sack firefighters and commits to real negotiations, we will call off the strikes.

On October 20 the mediation and conciliation service ACAS offered to step in and help resolve the dispute. The union welcomed the move and said it would accept immediate binding arbitration at ACAS.

In further moves to resolve the dispute, South Yorkshire FBU has:

- repeated its earlier offer of moving to 10-hour day and 14-hour night shifts
- said it would present the independent mediator's recommendation of moving to 10.5-hour day shifts and 13.5-hour night shifts to members if it was offered in its unaltered state (without the additional conditions demanded by the fire authority)
- proposed immediately calling in the Joint Secretaries to broker a deal.

On 22 October principal managers rejected all these offers and refused to remove the 744 dismissal notices.

Five local MPs have called for the authority to withdraw the dismissal notices and for the FBU to call off strike action.

Their House of Commons early day motion, put down on 19 October by Sheffield Attercliffe MP Clive Betts, calls for both sides to refer the issue to national union and employer negotiators. It has since been signed by ten more MPs from the North, North West and the Midlands.

South Yorkshire fire crews would be happy to enter talks without the fire authority demanding we agree the outcome before they start. 🔴

INVESTMENT

FBU members from all over the country came to Westminster with a simple message: investment not cuts. And they left MPs in no doubt that they will fight to defend the fire service and the jobs of the people who work within it

Two thousand FBU members converged on Westminster to defend jobs and services, piling pressure on the government to ditch its costly and ill-judged plans to replace 46 emergency fire control centres in England with nine regional centres. The project is already way over budget – and costing an estimated £1.4 billion.

The rally, held at Central Hall Westminster, came as support continued to ebb away from the FireControl project – the Local Government Association, whose elected members run fire authorities, is the latest to back away.

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, told the packed rally that the union will fight cuts in jobs and services as the squeeze tightens on public finances in the wake of bankers' greed and the credit crunch. He praised members in South Yorkshire for standing firm as they faced a "disgraceful attack" by a Labour-controlled authority intent on imposing new shift patterns.

"We're on the frontline of the fire and rescue service and our message is that the service needs investment not cuts and that we will fight tooth and nail to protect our jobs and our service.

"We are here to protect our members in emergency control. The theme of this rally is 'Part of the Team'. An attack on our members in fire control is an attack on our service as a whole ... services, jobs and conditions are under attack up and down the country.

"We are saying enough is enough and we're putting down a marker that we will resist every single attack and we will fight to defend every single job and we will fight to defend our service and our profession whoever is in power after the next general election."

Control members must not face compulsory redundancies and they must keep union recognition and grey book terms and

conditions, said Matt Wrack. If these modest demands are not met, the union will "use every single weapon in our arsenal to defend those jobs and defend those members," he warned.

Sharon Riley, FBU EC member for control staff, said all the signs were that the regional controls project was on its last legs with the Local Government Association withdrawing support. She called on the Government to "wake up", drop its plans and invest in front-line services. The 1,000 skilled control staff who would lose their jobs under the plan could not be replaced by call centre staff.

Many firefighters and control staff lobbied their MPs straight after the rally.

Vicky Knight, EC member for women, travelled from Merseyside. She pointed out the contradictions in government thinking: "They say they are attempting to increase diversity and the number of women in the FRS, while, through the back door, they are changing shift patterns which will mean



FBU members queue to see their MPs. Control members gathered for a group shot (right)

NOT CUTS



women already in the service will leave. There is no wraparound care from 8am-8pm.

"Women also stand to lose jobs disproportionately under plans for regionalised control centres. It's all smoke and mirrors – a cuts agenda dressed up as modernisation. A united response to any attack is the only way forward."

Karen Adams, watch manager at Springbourne in Dorset, lobbied Jim Knight, MP for Weymouth, also in Dorset, who is also an employment minister. Branch secretary Karen and colleagues left Mr Knight in no doubt about the strength of feeling among firefighters in his highly marginal constituency. "He says he's going to contact the fire minister and tell him why we feel regional control plans should be scrapped and the money reinvested in the fire service. He listened to what we had to say."

Leroy Phillpotts, national chair of the FBU Black and Ethnic Minority Members section, travelled from Gloucestershire. A DVD showing the key role played by a control officer in calming a terrified mother in a blazing house as colleagues mobilised fire

crews showed the crucial team role control staff play. "Regional controls could cost lives," he said.

Although regional controls do not directly threaten FBU members in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, they turned out in support of the campaign to defend jobs and services across the UK.

Lawrence Larmond, a firefighter from Neath in South Wales, said the message about everyone being part of a team "really struck home". Brighton firefighter Matt Prunty, one of 30 FBU members up from East Sussex, said: "We've got to raise awareness about the threat RCCs pose to both firefighters and members of the public."

STARK ILLUSTRATION OF HOW CONTROL STAFF SAVE LIVES

The rally opened with a video showing Samantha, a Preston control officer, calm and advise a distraught mother as fire crews were dispatched to rescue her and her young son. The video, premiered at the rally, focuses on the crucial role control staff play in fighting fires, saving lives and keeping the public safe.

Janet Kitchen is a control officer at the Lancashire FRS control room in Preston – where the events captured on the video took place. It shows control staff member Samantha comfort and advise Rachel, a distraught mother who cannot locate her son Daniel in her blazing home as fire crews are dispatched to rescue the pair. It gives a stark and moving illustration of the

crucial role trained control staff play in fighting fires, liaising with crews and helping save lives and keeping the public safe.

Janet works alongside Samantha. Gathering outside Westminster Hall for a group shot of control staff, she said the video should be shown to as many people as possible to show the vital role control staff play in supporting distressed members of the public as colleagues mobilise fire crews.

"We work very much as a team, passing on vital information to firefighters. And that's what it's all about. Take some of us away and you risk losing it all. That's what really worries me, and it should worry the public. Our job is all about protecting people. You don't mess with people's lives."



Matt Wrack addresses the rally



FBU TUBE
www.youtube.com/fbutube

For more on the lobby

FRONTLINE CUTS SPINNING US A LINE

Compare what politicians say about protecting frontline services and what they do about them and you will find some massive credibility gaps

If what politicians did was based on what they said, what a fine place Britain would be. Our children would be well and sensitively educated. Our homes and streets would be safe because the fire service and other emergency services would have all the resources they need. And when the economy imploded, as it has done in the past year, our leaders would make sure that the price was paid by the greedy bankers and financiers who caused the trouble.

At the TUC in Liverpool Lord Mandelson and then Gordon Brown made a point of saying that frontline public services would be protected from cuts. But, within hours of Mandelson saying it and the day before Brown said it, both Merseyside and Warwickshire announced plans to cut frontline fire services.

On the same day the Prime Minister was in Liverpool announcing the protection of frontline services from cuts, the local media were full of details of fire service cuts in Liverpool.

Over the following weeks the list of brigades planning cuts to frontline services grew: Derbyshire; Surrey; Hertfordshire; Lancashire; Cornwall; and Cleveland.

But as evidence of frontline cuts grew, so

did the promises. Here's Gordon Brown at the Labour Party conference: "In the next five years we cannot and will not cut support to our schools. We will not invest less, but more."

But, within days, Education Secretary Ed Balls was talking about saving £2 billion by getting rid of thousands of staff and curbing teachers' pay.

If Brown was specific, the Deputy Prime Minister in everything but name, Lord Mandelson, was vague. This is all he had to say about frontline services in a speech billed as the crucial Labour Party conference performance: "The truth is that the old Tory right that was rejected in 1997 are quietly feeling at home again with David Cameron. At home with his tax plans. At home with the barely disguised glee a new generation of Conservatives is showing at

the prospect of deep and savage cuts to public services."

The conference cheered, but did anyone notice what happened next? The noble lord simply changed the subject. Having told us the Conservatives' attitude towards frontline services, he said not one single word about what Labour would do.

Brown, at least, discussed that in vague terms. He said he came from a family where state education was valued and he grew up knowing the value of Britain's National Health Service. A rugby accident when he was a teenager left his sight permanently damaged: "And I come from a family which, independent and self-reliant as it was, could

GEORGE OSBORNE

Conservative shadow
chancellor

*'What I am saying to public
sector workers is that I want to
save your job'*





ALISTAIR DARLING
Chancellor of the Exchequer
'My colleagues must identify the frontline services they want to protect'

GORDON BROWN
Prime Minister
'Labour will not support cuts in the vital frontline services on which people depend'



DAVID CAMERON
Conservative party leader
'We'll freeze public sector pay for all but the one million lowest paid public sector workers'



PETER MANDELSON
First Secretary of State
'A new generation of Conservatives is showing glee at the prospect of deep and savage cuts to public services'

not have kept going without the compassion and caring of the NHS, because my parents could not easily have afforded to pay for operations on my eyes. So I come from a family for whom the NHS was quite simply the best insurance policy in the world."

Does this mean that the NHS and other frontline services are safe in Gordon Brown's hands? He managed to sound as though they were: "To pay for our schools, hospitals, police, and the change we want to make, we have to make choices about taxation and public spending."

But he, like Lord Mandelson, then changed the subject. He started talking about how too many teenage girls are having babies and getting flats and about the binge drinking culture. The details of Labour's programme to defend frontline services got lost somewhere.

Later, much later, this is what the Prime Minister said: "If it's an emergency you must get action in minutes, where it's a neighbourhood priority within the hour, and where it's a general but not urgent enquiry no one will have to wait more than 48 hours for a reply or a visit. That's what I mean by public services personal to people's needs."

Is that the message the emergency services needed to hear? It sounded like the start of it, at least. A Prime Minister who says an emergency needs action in minutes is surely planning to make sufficient investment in the fire and rescue service to make it happen.

Unfortunately, the Prime Minister's words are at odds with what's happening on the ground. In region after region we hear of fire chiefs forced to cut back on the essentials.

Take Warwickshire, which is cutting the number of fire appliances by a third and closing seven fire stations in what the county's

FBU chair Marcus Giles has called "the most savage cuts ever put forward by a fire authority." He said they would mean "fewer appliances and firefighters spread more thinly across the county" and "significantly increase response times to 999 incidents across parts of Warwickshire."

Marcus Giles says that Warwickshire fire service recently attended two serious fires at the same time. "This virtually stripped the county of fire engines and ended up with West Midlands, Leicestershire and Northamptonshire fire services operating within parts of Warwickshire."

Or take Essex, where fire chiefs think the solution to squeezed budgets is to cut at least 44 firefighters' jobs by 2010, bringing numbers down from 954 to 905. Essex FBU brigade chair Keith Flynn says this will leave "too few firefighters on duty to crew all the fire engines when they are needed in a 999 emergency." Essex fire chiefs also want smaller fire vehicles, which hold fewer firefighters.

"Cuts to the frontline 999 service should be the last resort," says Keith Flynn. That seems to be Gordon Brown's view. But the difference is that Keith Flynn means it.

The Prime Minister's words are at odds with what's happening on the ground



FIRECONTROL **Drifting to disaster**

Observers of government policy on regional fire controls are irresistibly reminded of Gericault's famous painting of the aftermath of the wreck of the *Medusa*, which ran aground off West Africa in 1816. Its lifeboats were insufficient to carry the 400 people on board, so a raft carrying nearly 150 of them was set adrift. Before long they turned to brutality and cannibalism. All but 15 died in the 13 days before rescue. Many had gone mad.



on pretending nothing's wrong", says Tam McFarlane, FBU executive council member for the South West, a region that has been at the forefront of the fight against regional control centres. "But every promise of hope on the horizon is just another mirage.

"The government needs to face up to what's happening here. They have to recognise what's around them, accept they've got it wrong and accept they've made a mistake.

"The government has thrown millions of pounds of taxpayers' money at FireControl but they've made a complete mess of it," says Tam McFarlane. "It is a scandal that all of this money has been diverted away from frontline fire services, over £50 million of it into the pockets of consultants."

"The government's control project has drifted aimlessly for the past six years," adds Sharon Riley, FBU executive council member for controls. "It's time to call it a day and read it the last rites. Even its supporters are deserting the project."

And the regional control centres themselves are deserted hulks. Empty, bar the odd meeting for window dressing, these centres are now costing the government £5,000 a day each to stand empty – that's £40,000 a day for

**'FireControl is a
shipwrecked raft
of consultants and
hangers-on pretending
nothing is wrong'**

Desperate people, shipwrecked victims, clinging to a rudderless wreck heading for who knows where. Every so often they think they have spotted a rescue ship on the horizon, only for hopes to be dashed.

Sound familiar? It's Theodore Gericault's nineteenth century painting *The Raft of the Medusa*, with modern day echoes of government plans for regional fire control centres.

One minister wrote about the emerging tale of the scandal: "I bemoan the fact that the journalists revel in disclosing details of deplorable scenes, the picture of which must never be brought before the eyes of the public."

The warning came from the French navy minister writing to King Louis XVIII in 1816 about the shipwreck. Perhaps at some stage we will find a note from a British politician with similar warnings about FireControl.

"FireControl is a shipwrecked raft crewed by consultants and project hangers-

eight English regions, with London soon to be added.

"It's scandalous – throwing good money after bad," says Tam McFarlane. "They are buildings of no use to anyone just sitting there gathering dust – empty monuments to a misguided policy that are available for all to see."

FireControl is hugely unpopular with firefighters throughout the UK. A recent survey of FBU members by YouGov reveals:

- 93% of members think the government should scrap regional control centres
- 95% say regional controls are unnecessary
- 86% think the centres would worsen the response times to an incident, and
- 60% have no confidence at all in the government's abilities to run them.

"This survey puts on paper what our members have been saying for years," says Sharon Riley. "There's no room for ambiguity here – regional control centres have received

a massive thumbs down from the very people who would have had to work in them."

And the reason, she reckons, is simple.

"Never has a computer system been solely responsible for saving a life," she says. "It's our members using their professional skills and training together with database information that save lives.

"To reduce the number of control staff by two thirds is to reduce this life-saving capacity and to risk not only the safety of the public but of firefighters as well.

"From within the service there is no confidence at the ability of the government to deliver this project and this is echoed outside the service by fire authorities, the Local Government Association, local councillors and MPs alike."

The FBU believes it would be better to scrap the whole system and invest the money on frontline services and quickly upgrading existing controls.

Sharon Riley agrees, saying: "The current economic climate and pledges from Labour that it will not cut frontline services in the public sector must surely now ring alarm bells.

"The RCC buildings are costing hundreds of thousands of pounds a month to stand idle and empty while civil servants and an army of consultants continue the costly farce of trying to deliver the undeliverable and the unwanted."

Tam McFarlane adds: "It wasn't long ago I was sitting in front of Gordon Brown at TUC and he was saying there would be no cuts in frontline public services.

"I found that hard to take because I know of cuts in the fire service. If there is money to be spent – and clearly there is – it should be spent on frontline services because that's what the public wants."

The union also believes the money would be better spent upgrading existing fire control rooms which have, for five years, suffered an investment moratorium in expectation of the move to a regional centre.

"The infrastructure is now out of date – many controls have not been upgraded since 2004 because it was thought there would be no need to do it again," says Tam.

"The old equipment isn't affecting members of the public yet, but only because our members are working very hard to make sure it doesn't. We're working on a shoestring and it's only a matter of time before there's a tragedy."

The Conservative Party has pledged to scrap the plans, prompting Sharon Riley to issue a final warning.

"The government must put a stop to this fiasco once and for all," she says. "What is needed is investment in existing controls and in the people working in them.

"The government should listen to the professionals before it is too late. Otherwise there will be no going back and the Labour government will be going down with the ship."

WHAT'S MY ROLE?

**Stewart Maxwell,
Member of the Scottish
Parliament, former fire
service employee and
campaigner for fire-safer
cigarettes**

Stewart Maxwell MSP is no stranger to campaigning. He can rightly claim the credit for the introduction of the ban on smoking in public places that saw Scotland lead the way in making its pubs and other public buildings smoke free zones.

The SNP politician introduced a private members' bill in 2003 to introduce a ban. This led the Scottish Executive to introduce legislation in the Scottish Parliament.

Today Stewart Maxwell is campaigning for the introduction of fire-safer cigarettes in Scotland, and as a consequence the whole United Kingdom.

The former fire service worker, who worked for 10 years in the service in a variety of positions including fire control, has campaigned in the Scottish Parliament for the last five years to bring about this change.

Lit cigarettes are recognised as a major cause of fire fatalities in the UK. In Scotland alone in the period 2007-08, 26 deaths – 45 per cent of total fire fatalities deaths – were attributed to smoking materials.

No one argues with these facts, yet Stewart Maxwell, supported by the FBU

'RIP cigarettes are already the only type of cigarettes on sale in New York State, Vermont, California and Canada. Finland plans to introduce them next year.'

in Scotland, has been campaigning for the introduction of safer cigarettes since 2004 to no avail.

Those with the power to introduce the legislation have shown no urgency to bring about the changes necessary.

In 2006 *Firefighter* criticised the lack of action saying: "Fire-safer cigarettes could prevent 2,500 fires a year and save hundreds of lives. Who says so? The Government. So why does it drag its feet on the issue?"

A year later, in November 2007 the EU decided to work towards a standard for the production of fire-safer cigarettes. The UK Government welcomed the move, but, at the same time, it said that this would be a long process and it would therefore consult on the introduction of fire-safer or reduced ignition propensity (RIP) cigarettes to the UK.

Still nothing happened and in its responses to Stewart Maxwell, the UK Government has continually repeated the mantra that they would rather progress this issue on an EU basis. Meanwhile UK citizens continue to die.

Stewart Maxwell, who represents the West of Scotland, says: "It's like watching treacle run. RIP cigarettes are already the only type of cigarettes on sale in places such



as New York State, Vermont, California and Canada. Finland plans to introduce them next year.

"I cannot understand why the UK government cannot introduce legislation now based on the Finnish legislation and what is being done in Canada and several US states, then bring it into line with the EU legislation when it is introduced."

The MSP explains that this is not a devolved issue because it does not come under health and safety legislation but product design. This is an area for which the Westminster government has retained responsibility.

Stewart Maxwell points out that there is nothing to prevent cigarette manufacturers acting immediately on their own.

But he says that in correspondence the industry seems to be intent on using delaying tactics, talking about the need



SPL



FRASER BAIN

Stewart Maxwell: a simple measure that could make a huge difference to the lives of many

up from the smouldering cigarette.

Stewart Maxwell explains: "A cigarette dropped accidentally on a bed at, say, 11pm can smoulder until 3am in the morning before it ignites and the fire starts but by this time the person is sound asleep."

Despite product design being a non-devolved matter, Stewart Maxwell is confident that he is making progress. As this edition of *Firefighter* was going to press he was meeting representatives of the British Medical Association and the Scottish Government has agreed to allow a debate in the Scottish Parliament on the subject. This means that, unlike previous motions he has brought to the Scottish Parliament on RIP cigarettes, this one will be voted on to allow the Scottish Parliament to express a view on safer cigarettes.

This will increase the pressure on the UK Parliament to act on the matter rather than wait for the slow wheels of Brussels to turn.

Roddy Robertson, FBU Executive Council member for Scotland, called on MSPs to get behind Stewart Maxwell, saying: "This is such a simple measure that could make a huge difference to so many people's lives. We fully support Stewart Maxwell on

The Government believes that up to 120 lives a year could be saved in the UK by the introduction of safer cigarettes and up to 1,000 a year in Europe

this issue and call on MSPs to support his parliamentary motion."

Some critics of the safer cigarettes claim that they increase health risks because in order to keep the cigarette alight a smoker must inhale deeper and more often but Stewart Maxwell does not lay great store by these claims.

He says: "I have doubts about the validity of the claim that this is a huge health risk. Of all the correspondence I have received on this subject I have had only one person raise this as an issue. Americans are known to be litigious but I have heard of no legal case in the States based on this claim."

In human terms the stakes are high. The UK Government believes that up to 120 lives a year could be saved in the UK by the introduction of safer cigarettes and up to 1,000 a year in Europe.

Surely this death toll is all the motivation a Government should require to introduce legislation which no one denies will save lives.

It is this life-saving role which drives Stewart Maxwell. In the past four years in Scotland alone 100 individuals died as a result of fires caused by smoking materials.

Does he have to say anything more?

for full consultation before any decisions are taken.

"There is nothing hugely technical about manufacturing this type of cigarette," says Stewart Maxwell. "The difference is in the paper used. RIP cigarettes have what is like a series of 'speed bumps' which consist of a different paper which does not allow the oxygen to penetrate through to the tobacco and thus keep the cigarette alight so, unlike the cigarettes on the market today, they do not smoulder but go out."

Many fire victims die as the result of smoking in bed. They fall asleep, dropping their lit cigarette which smoulders giving off smoke before finally bursting into flames.

Very often the victim dies from inhalation of smoke. Firefighters called to the scene can often quickly extinguish the fire but the victim's life has already been lost due to the smoke emitted as the heat builds

Working For You



TONY SMITH

Brigade secretary, Hertfordshire

Safer Hertfordshire campaign

In 2006 we saw massive cuts in Hertfordshire. Two stations closed and 40 frontline posts were lost. Now the county council wants to impose a further £6 million of cuts over three years.

Firefighters are determined to fight back – which is why Hertfordshire FBU is launching our Safer Hertfordshire campaign. Leaflets and stickers set out the case against cuts and for public services and urge union members and the public to lobby our elected representatives.

Just the other week firefighters in St Albans rescued a child from a serious house fire and were praised for doing a fantastic job. Their prompt action undoubtedly saved the child's life.

This is what firefighters do and we do not seek praise for it. What we do ask is that we are properly funded so that there are enough of us and we are properly trained, equipped and resourced.

Firefighters from across Hertfordshire joined the national lobby on 21 October and urged MPs to invest cash in the fire service and to halt the plans to regionalise fire control rooms – a project that has already cost £1.5 billion, will not save a

Instead of cuts to our frontline service and attacks on working conditions we need reinvestment. We are calling on politicians to see sense.

single life and is not wanted by anybody in the fire service.

We were disappointed by the lack of concern that some politicians showed, but St Albans MP Anne Main told local firefighters: "This is not the first time I have offered my assistance to local firefighters and I am happy to do so again."

The city's firefighters are hopeful that their MP will secure a parliamentary debate on regional controls.

Instead of cuts to our frontline service and attacks on working conditions, we need reinvestment. We are calling on politicians to see sense, reverse their plans before someone loses their life unnecessarily, and join us in working for a Safer Hertfordshire.

It's not just seasonal flu

Swine flu has become a global pandemic and is confirmed in 210 countries

SWINE FLU

The World Health Organization (WHO) says the spread of swine flu has become a global pandemic. Cases have now been confirmed in 210 countries and territories around the world.

The number of new swine flu cases in England rose from 18,000 in the first week of October to an estimated 53,000 in the week ending 23 October.

In most cases swine flu is a mild illness, with symptoms similar to those of seasonal flu. But as swine flu spreads it is very important to know the symptoms of the disease (see box) so that you can recognise it in yourself and others at an early stage.

If, after checking the symptoms, you suspect you may have swine flu, call your GP directly if you or a dependant:

- ◆ has a serious existing illness that weakens the immune system, such as cancer
- ◆ are pregnant
- ◆ have a sick child under one
- ◆ the condition suddenly gets much worse
- ◆ the condition is still getting worse after seven days (five for a child).

High-risk groups

Some people get better by staying in bed, drinking plenty of water and taking over-the-counter flu medication.

However, some groups of people are more at risk of serious illness if they catch swine flu and will need to start taking antiviral medication

People are particularly at risk if they have:

- ◆ chronic (long-term) lung disease
- ◆ chronic heart disease
- ◆ chronic kidney disease
- ◆ chronic liver disease
- ◆ chronic neurological disease (neurological disorders include motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease)
- ◆ immunosuppressant (whether caused by disease or treatment)
- ◆ diabetes mellitus.

Also at risk are:

CHECKING SYMPTOMS

It makes sense to have a working thermometer at home, as an increase in temperature is one of the main symptoms. If you or a member of your family has a **fever** or **high temperature** (over 38°C/100.4°F) and two or more of the following symptoms, you may have swine flu:

- ◆ **unusual tiredness**
- ◆ **headache**
- ◆ **runny nose**
- ◆ **sore throat**
- ◆ **shortness of breath or cough**
- ◆ **loss of appetite**
- ◆ **aching muscles**
- ◆ **diarrhoea or vomiting**

- ◆ patients who have had drug treatment for asthma within the past three years
- ◆ pregnant women
- ◆ people aged 65 and older
- ◆ young children under five.

The latest official advice is that people in these higher-risk groups who catch swine flu should start taking antivirals as soon as possible.

Outlook

Cases have been confirmed in all age groups, but children and younger people seem much more likely to be affected. To date, fewer cases have been confirmed in older adults.

For a minority of people, the virus has caused severe illness. In many of these cases, other factors are likely to have contributed to the severity of the illness.

Swine flu vaccination programme

Patients in hospital deemed at risk of the infection, including pregnant women and people with underlying health problems, were the first to be vaccinated with around 13 million in the priority groups to be vaccinated after that.

Priority groups

1. Individuals aged six months to 65 years with underlying health problems and the immuno-suppressed, which includes chemotherapy patients
2. Pregnant women
3. Household contacts of people with compromised immune systems
4. Individuals aged over 65 with health problems

→ Swine flu information

England: www.nhs.uk or www.direct.gov.uk/swineflu or call 0800 1513513

Scotland: www.nhs24.com or call 08454 242424

Wales: www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk or www.wales.gov.uk/health or call 0845 46 47 or 0800 1513 513

Northern Ireland: www.dhsspsni.gov.uk or www.publichealth.hscni.net or call 0800 0514142

The National Pandemic Flu Service is an online service that will assess your symptoms and, if needed, provide an authorisation number that can be used to collect antiviral medication from a local collection point.

www.pandemicflu.direct.gov.uk/
For those who do not have internet access, the same service can be accessed

by telephone on:

Telephone: 0800 151 3100

Minicom: 0800 151 3200



Asbestos records

Q My husband has been diagnosed with asbestosis. He may have been exposed working for the fire service, but we think he was also exposed when he was employed by several engineering firms in the 1960s. Many of them have long since ceased to exist. Can we still seek compensation from them?

A In an asbestosis claim each employer is liable to contribute to the compensation in proportion to the amount of the disease they caused. It is possible to pursue a claim against defunct companies if their employers' liability insurer can be found.

A solicitor who is an expert in asbestos-related diseases will try many routes to trace the insurers of former employers.

The failure of some employers to obtain insurance is a problem. But a bigger one is that, even though employers' liability insurance has been compulsory since 1972, there was no requirement for employers or insurers to keep records until 1999. Neither is there any central historical record of employers' insurance policies.

Some insurance companies have ceased trading and some have been taken over by other insurers.

The insurance industry itself runs a tracing scheme, but it has a very poor record of finding insurers.

When insurers cannot be found it means that the claimant can only recover compensation from those that can. This means that the claimants only receive part of the damages they should. This is a huge injustice and is why Thompsons has called on the Government to set up an

Employers Liability Insurance Bureau (ELIB) – similar to the Motor Insurance Bureau that compensates the victims of uninsured drivers.

Hopefully the insurers of all your husband's former employers can be found. But if they cannot then obtaining expert opinion and evidence as to the extent of the exposure by those that can be traced (and, of course, evidence of exposure while working as a firefighter) will be key to maximising the amount of compensation he can obtain.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

Legal Beagle

Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

Council compensation

Q I read that local councils complain about paying out thousands in compensation to people who are injured by tripping over uneven pavements. I'm a retired member and fell on a broken paving stone recently and fractured my ankle. Is it wrong to ask for compensation?

A Local authorities have a responsibility to ensure that their pavements and highways are in good repair.

If they fail to maintain and repair pavements and, as a result, someone is injured they cannot object when people claim compensation.

A fractured ankle is a significant injury that is likely to be having quite an impact on your life, especially as you are a pensioner. You will be less mobile and may need help to get around. You are likely to have had several trips to hospital and will probably need physiotherapy when the fracture is healed.

There may be lasting damage or loss of mobility in the ankle.

Compensation is not just for the injury, but for the time and money spent to have it treated (taxi to the hospital for example) and for things like paying for help around the house, with the shopping and other day-to-day tasks.

Councils' claims about how much they are paying out are often wildly exaggerated and are an attempt to make people like you feel bad about claiming compensation for the pain, damage and lasting impact caused by their failure to keep pavements in good repair.

Local authorities should stop whingeing and instead fulfil their responsibilities.

They may even find that it is cheaper in the long run to maintain pavements and highways than to pay out to people injured by their negligence.

To avoid claims all they have to do is do their job properly.

That aside, if you have photos of the defective paving stone that caused your injury then it will be much easier for a solicitor to pursue compensation for you. Councils have a tendency to rush to make repairs when they know they may face a compensation claim.

Contact the FBU legal service to get help and expert legal advice on your claim.

→ The advice published here is not intended as legal advice on individual cases. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.

‘There was a sense of achievement on the way home’

STEFANO CAGNONI

Jean Westwood’s day off might have been away from her work in Northumberland’s emergency fire control in Morpeth, but her visit to London to lobby her MP against government plans to scrap local fire controls was a busy one

Jean Westwood’s “day off” should resonate with a good few *Firefighter* readers – especially those who joined the FBU’s rally and lobby to defend jobs and services on October 21.

Jean, who works in Northumberland’s emergency fire control in Morpeth, had never been on an FBU lobby of Parliament before. But, as an experienced control staff member, she was aghast at how much is at stake in the government’s plans to replace 46 local emergency fire controls with nine regional centres.

And she was determined to put her case face to face with local MP David Clelland in Westminster to add to pressure on a government which is becoming increasingly isolated. It was also a good opportunity to renew contacts with control colleagues who are waging the same battle against the FireControl project around the country. She’s in touch with many by email – but meeting in person is an added bonus.

The arguments for scrapping the FireControl project are clear and compelling. “Nobody wants regional control centres except the government. The Local Government Association and individual fire chiefs are

now speaking out,” says Jean, who has over 30 years’ experience in fire control.

“The plans would be very bad news for control staff, firefighter safety and the public. They should be scrapped.

“There’s been so much uncertainty, so much worry and it’s a complete waste of money – going up from £100 million to £1.4 billion. It should have been up and running here in 2006 – the latest date we’ve got is 2011. In the meantime costs are escalating. They’ve built a new building at Belmont in Durham, but it hosts meetings most of the time and yet costs £150,000 a month to run. That money could be better used by investing in existing controls and frontline services.”

Alerting the public

Jean and her colleagues have already been out alerting the public. “We’ve been out on the streets where we get a good response. When people dial 999 they want to get through to staff who know the area, not talk to someone who could be based at the other end of the country. It really doesn’t make sense. You can’t treat emergency



Jean Westwood in conversation with colleagues at the lobby

A photograph of Jean Westwood, a woman with short blonde hair, wearing a black jacket. She is holding a large black sign with white text that reads "DEFEND OUR FIRE SERVICE" and "Rally and Lobby of Parliament". There is also a logo on the sign that says "SAFER FIREFIGHTERS SAFER COMMUNITIES" with the FBU logo. In the background, there is a banner with the words "Fire Brigades" and a graphic of a fire engine.

JEAN WESTWOOD

Jean Westwood is the FBU's North East region control rep. She works in Northumberland's fire control at Morpeth. October 21 was the first lobby of parliament she has taken part in.

control like call centres."

The North East is a varied region, and the four controls – in Durham, Northumberland, Cleveland and Tyne and Wear – are well attuned to their locations, staffed by clued-up professionals with a wealth of local knowledge.

"Northumberland is the second biggest county in England. It's quite remote in parts," says Jean of her home patch. "You may only get one call if there's a fire in an isolated farmhouse – so you've got to make sure you get as much relevant information as possible. There are different challenges in Cleveland – it's got one of the highest industrial risk areas in western Europe with a large number of petrochemical sites, crammed into Billingham, Stockton and Middlesbrough."

We are all part of a team

FBU members from the North East saw the lobby as a very productive day out, says Jean. Even the train journey to London and back was put to good use – with colleagues discussing key issues to be highlighted to MPs on the way there and working on plans for more local campaigning on the way back.

"It was good to see so many people there, control staff and firefighters, to hear the South Yorkshire crews praised from the platform, hear inspiring speeches and meet old friends. The day really brought home that in the fire service we are all part of a team – which was highlighted in a powerful DVD made with Preston control staff. We plan to use it for campaigning work in the next few months."

As Jean explains: "We made the point to MPs that paying £1.4 billion and rising for something even the government can't state will be better than what we've got really doesn't make sense at all.

"With the squeeze on public cash, MPs were very interested in how much it was all costing. Mr Clelland said any responsible government would have to listen to the arguments we were making. That's what the Early Day Motion on control spelt out."

Alerting the public

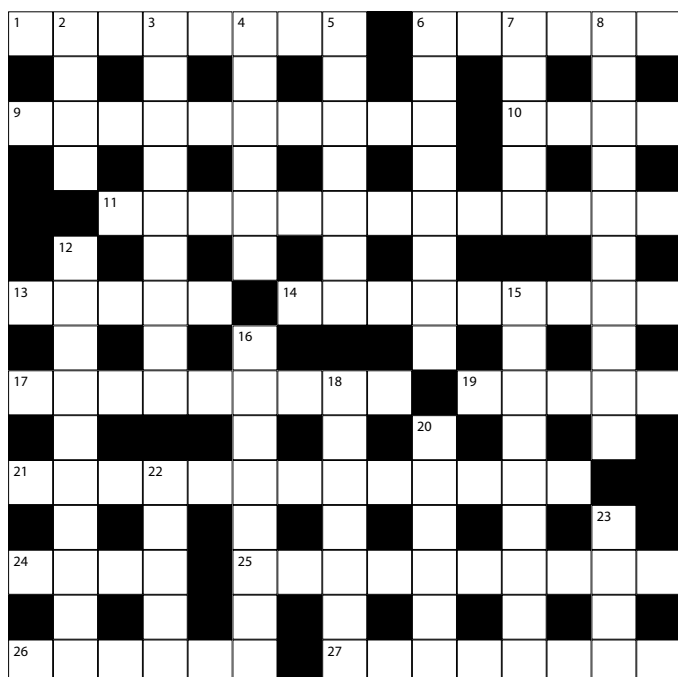
Anyone who has followed the government's terrible track record on costly and botched IT projects will understand Jean's fears over reliance on untried technology when a distraught caller phones.

"I've been in this job for years, and I certainly don't want to take emergency calls from around the country, totally reliant on technology telling me where the nearest fire engine is. I want to leave a fire service that's intact for the people who come after me. It's really important to make a stand."

So – a good day off? Jean thinks it was a day well spent: "There was a sense of achievement on the way home. We've been down to London and put the case to MPs. Those MPs we saw seemed supportive. They are now quite answerable to us. I'll certainly be following it up with David Clelland and I'm sure colleagues around the country will be doing the same with their MPs.

"This uncertainty over jobs, firefighter safety and the prospect of providing an inferior service to the public has already dragged on for years. It's time to call a halt. We're not going away and we expect MPs to deliver. Now we're back home, there's a lot to be done."

Quick Crossword

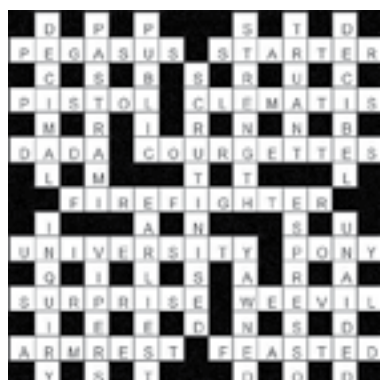


ACROSS

- 1 Begs (8)
- 6 Sunk snooker ball (or canned shrimp?) (6)
- 9 Burial grounds (10)
- 10 Fastened, or finished on equal points (4)
- 11 They dig their history! (13)
- 13 Cured meat of back or sides of pig (5)
- 14 ...and overworked? (9)
- 17 It'll get the grime from the tips of your fingers (9)
- 19, 20 Firefighter column on matters judicial (5, 6)
- 21 Manipulated election, debate etc (13)
- 24 Cry; sharp; eager (4)
- 25 Assertion or accusation yet to be proved (10)
- 26 Invisible workplace hazard (6)
- 27 Sheep barbers (8)

DOWN

- 2 First name of entertainers Bolan, Almond and painter Chagall (4)
- 3 Venue of 2009 Trades Union Congress (9)
- 4 (Sense of) regular beat (6)
- 5 Cut of steak (7)
- 6 Jewish festival (8)
- 7 Native people of central Africa (5)
- 8 Water not a good idea for such fires (10)
- 12 The ones who issue the instructions (10)
- 15 Front-person of TV or radio programme (9)
- 16 Railways that run on roads? (8)
- 18 Seven-inch vinyl records; unattached people (7)
- 20 See 19
- 22 Wash through with clean water (5)
- 23 Loud leonine noise (4)



Solution to October 2009 crossword

Winner of the August/September 2009 quiz
Graham Page of Hertfordshire

Answers to October quiz

1. b
2. b
3. a
4. b
5. a



Prize quiz

Win a Christmas hamper with our music themed quiz

1. What did Ozzy Osbourne do on stage in 1982 to offend animal lovers?

- a. Bite the head off a bat
- b. Step on a live mouse
- c. Throw a cat into the audience
- d. Throw a drumstick at a cat

2. Who commissioned graffiti artist Banksy to do the artwork for one of their albums?

- a. Arctic Monkeys
- b. Robbie Williams
- c. Blur
- d. Oasis

3. In what year did the Sex Pistols perform their first ever gig – which lasted a whole ten minutes before the plug was pulled!

- a. 1975
- b. 1977
- c. 1976



d. 1979

4. What is the name of the farm where the Glastonbury festival is held?

- a. Somer Farm
- b. Worthy Farm
- c. Somersby Farm
- d. Monkton Farm

5. Which musician played the role of Pink in Pink Floyd's film *The Wall*?

- a. Mick Jagger
- b. Phil Collins
- c. Sting
- d. Bob Geldof



HOW TO ENTER

To win a Christmas hamper please send your answers to the Prize Quiz by Thursday 17th December 2009 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (Nov/Dec 2009), FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.

StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

When is a secret not a secret?



They may be so poor in the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service that they have to save money by making firefighters work 12-hour shifts, but **they're not too poor to gamble £5,531 on attempt at a libel case against the Fire Brigades Union.**

It was a pretty poor gamble. The FBU issued a press release revealing details of undisclosed payments made to Mark Smitherman, South Yorkshire's chief fire officer, and his deputy, Steve Swarbrick. Mr Smitherman and his colleagues sent for their lawyers, who, in return for £5,531 of the Fire Service's money, tried to argue that there was a difference between a bonus and an "additional local award".

The FBU spent a bit more than a tenth of that sum on lawyers to send back a letter which you could roughly translate in two words, the second one being "off".

How do we know how much South Yorkshire Fire Authority spent on lawyers for this doomed enterprise? Do we know about it because the fire service's public-spirited bosses think the public ought to know how its money is spent?

No, not exactly. We know because the FBU put in a request under the Freedom of Information Act and the SYFA was forced to disclose the information. Which is, as it happens, exactly the same reason why we know about Mr Smitherman's "additional local award".

They also complained at the word used by FBU to describe the fact that their "additional pay award" was undisclosed. **Of course, it wasn't "secret" at all. It's just that, to get the information, the FBU had to put in a request under the Freedom of Information Act,** to force the fire service to give it to them.

The publicly available information explains about the pay, but does not mention the additional pay award (you know, the one that isn't a bonus). So its statement of accounts for 2007/2008 says that no officers in 2006/2007 received remuneration of more than £120,000.

But the pay charts obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show that both Mr Smitherman and his deputy, Steve Swarbrick, did get more than £120,000, including the bit we mustn't call a you know what.

He's not the messiah



Station Cat thinks many fire authority councillors are on the dozy side. But not in South Yorkshire where they are truly blessed to have a new messiah.

He comes in the shape of Councillor Paul Scriven, who backs the sacking of 744 firefighters to force through contract changes.

A recent poll of FBU members also revealed a culture of bullying and intimi-



dation was rife in South Yorkshire fire service whose activities Mr Scriven is meant to oversee.

Scriven's election literature includes a poster with Jesus, Ghandi, Mandela, Einstein, Marie Curie, Martin Luther King and other notables pictured declaring: "These people changed the world, now let this man do the same."

As one South Yorkshire firefighter pointed out: **"He's not built India, not ended apartheid, nor changed the world through scientific discovery. He can't even solve a dispute about shifts."**

Break it to him gently: "He's not the messiah, he's a very"

Expensive business



Firefighters will be relieved to know that management training for the top brass isn't being cut in these harsh economic times.

More and more of them are getting an MBA, or Master of Business Administration – the must-have business qualification for go-getting business moguls.

The MBA originated in the USA 100 years ago, but only came to Britain in the 1960s.

It mushroomed under Thatcher because it fitted the mood of the times, and now no British university is complete without a department teaching it.

This year there are three students from the fire service studying for an MBA at Henley Management College.

Henley is one of the most splendid business schools in Britain. It's housed in a magnificent country house whose huge, manicured lawns slope majestically down to the Thames. **MBAs there cost thousands of pounds.**

And the Cat wants to know which frontline services are being cut to pay for them.

Spot the innovation



Gary Dobson, assistant commissioner of the London Fire Service, took his MBA at Portsmouth University and he told the *Independent* newspaper: "Without the MBA I

would not be doing the job I am now. Once you get to my level, you need a really good understanding of disciplines such as financial management, budget setting and performance management."

He was, he says, able to help his fellow students with "many examples of innovative working in the London Fire Brigade".

Ian Leahair, FBU executive member for London, is puzzled. **"I can't think of a single example of innovative working he's brought in,"** he says.

✂ if you have any snippets you think Station Cat should get his sharp claws into email: stationcat@fbu.org.uk

25-year badges



Arthur Krinsky (centre), London Fire Brigade, receives his 25-year badge from Stewart Brown, Executive Council member LGBT. Looking on is watch manager Nicola Alcock



Brendan McEvoy (l) and **Andy Cooper** (centre) receive their 25-year badges from West Midlands membership secretary Pardeep Raw



Gary Elliot (r) Bridgwater Fire Station, Devon and Somerset, receives his 25-year badge from Region 13 EC member Tam McFarlane



Ian Ensall (l) and **Adrian Fielding** (centre) receive their 25-year badges from Region 7 EC member Rose Jones



Simon Roberts (l), Blue Watch, Retford, Nottinghamshire, receives his 25-year badge from Region 6 EC member Dave Green



John McGhee (r) receives his 25-year badge from Tam Tierney, former regional official, Region 1



Paul Barlow (l), South Yorkshire Training and Development Centre, receives his 25-year badge from Region 4 Executive Council member Jerry Pagan



Larry Stokes (r), White Watch, Leamington Spa, receives his 25-year badge from Warwickshire brigade secretary Mark Rattray



Pete Hicks (r), Bridgwater Fire Station, Devon and Somerset, receives his 25-year badge from Region 13 EC member Tam McFarlane



Tim Dixey (l), Kingston Green Watch, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Dave Young



Colin Roberts (l) receives his 25-year badge from Wrexham branch secretary Richie Clutton



Pete Jennings (r), Kingston Red Watch, receives his 25-year badge from branch rep Dave Young

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Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.**

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

T THOMPSONS SOLICITORS